

Talks on forming German coalition government begin

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Talks for forming a coalition government began in Berlin on Wednesday. The leadership of the conservative Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) met first with the Free Democrats (FDP) and then with the Greens. The FDP and Greens held their first meeting on Thursday. The first meeting of all parties will take place today.

All participants praised the constructive atmosphere and expressed confidence about future progress of the formation of a “Jamaica coalition,” named after the colors of the parties involved. At the same time, they said that long and tough negotiations lie ahead. It is expected that the coalition talks will last at least until Christmas and possibly even into the New Year.

During this period, the current government will remain in office and continue to conduct business, although it no longer has a parliamentary majority. Outgoing ministers, like Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU), who is switching to lead the parliament (Bundestag), or SPD ministers who resign early, cannot be replaced. Their ministries will be jointly run by other ministers. The government’s ability to act is therefore restricted.

The media has focused on potential points of agreement and issues in dispute among the participants in the talks. For example, the CDU/CSU want to restrict the number of refugees and asylum seekers to 200,000 per year, while the Greens oppose this. The Greens and FDP are demanding an immigration law, which has been rejected by the CDU/CSU.

There are also differences on finance and tax policy. The FDP wants to substantially cut taxes and eliminate the solidarity payments introduced after reunification, which the Greens want to retain. The CSU sees itself as a defender of wealthy corporate inheritances.

On policy towards Europe, the CSU and FDP oppose a common budget for the Euro Zone, as proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron, while the Greens and

sections of the CDU are in favour of closer cooperation with Macron. In the areas of transport, energy, climate change and agricultural policy, there are also significant differences.

However, these differences are secondary. Many are being intentionally exaggerated so they can be used later as bargaining chips in the negotiations. The truth is that the coalition talks will deal with fundamental questions that are barely being discussed in public.

The basic outline of the incoming government’s policies had already been decided when the polling stations closed their doors on September 24, because all parties, including the SPD and Left Party, are in agreement.

Confronting deepening international tensions, especially with the United States and increasingly with China, explosive contradictions in the global financial system, and growing social inequality, Germany’s ruling elite is striving once again to act politically and militarily as a world power and suppress all opposition.

This was the content of the coalition talks four years ago, which took close to three months to complete—a new record. The coalition of the CDU/CSU and SPD was barely in office when it proclaimed the end of military restraint, backed the coup in Ukraine, sent German troops to the Russian border, Iraq and Mali, and adopted a programme of rearmament totalling €130 billion. At the same time, it continued the social cutbacks of previous governments, which led to a substantial rise in precarious work and poverty.

These policies were extremely unpopular, as shown by the major loss of support for the governing parties at the election. The CDU/CSU and SPD lost a combined 14 percent of the vote. The right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD) profited from this in two senses. The right-wing, militarist propaganda prepared the ideological ground for the AfD, while the support for these anti-

worker policies from the SPD and Left Party enabled the AfD to pose as opponents of the established parties.

The ruling class considers it still too soon to bring the AfD into government. It fears that this would provoke bitter resistance. The ruling class is therefore seeking to find a new base for its right-wing policies among sections of the privileged middle class, which in the past oriented more to the Left Party or Greens. This is the significance of the Greens' entry into government with the conservatives and FDP.

The Greens have been cooperating with these parties for some time at the state level: in Baden-Württemberg where a Green member is minister president, in Hesse where they are in coalition with the CDU, in Rhineland-Palatinate where they are part of a "traffic light" coalition with the SPD and FDP, in Saxony-Anhalt in an alliance with the CDU and SPD, and in Schleswig-Holstein in a Jamaica coalition. But at the federal level, which is responsible for foreign policy, the military, and domestic security, such a coalition is a first.

The Greens first entered the federal government in 1998 in alliance with the SPD. The former pacifists were required to overcome the deep-rooted popular opposition to foreign military interventions and to impose in the form of the Agenda 2010 the largest social counterrevolution in postwar Germany. When the Greens left government seven years later, foreign military interventions had become routine and the social achievements of the postwar era were largely destroyed.

Joschka Fischer, the Green foreign minister at that time, has now spoken out in an opinion piece for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. In it, he denounced the Catalan nationalists, who have been violently suppressed by the Spanish government, and described Catalonia's independence referendum as unlawful and a "disaster for the European Union."

"It would be an utter historical absurdity," wrote Fischer, "if the member states of the European Union would enter a phase of secession and disintegration in the 21st century, when—confronted with the new major global powers—China, India, the US, etc.—Europeans will need more solidarity and integration for their common future."

The meaning of this statement is unmistakable: Fischer, who as Foreign Minister backed the separatists in Kosovo militarily, is attacking the Catalan nationalists because they are standing in the way of the EU's expansion into a major military power capable of competing with "China, India, the US, etc."

His friend and mentor, the Green Daniel Cohn-Bendit,

recently made a joint appearance at the Frankfurt Book Fair with French President Macron, who is pursuing the same goal, while in France he is making the state of emergency permanent and destroying the social achievements secured by the working class.

There can be no doubt that as part of a CDU/CSU/FDP/Green coalition, the Greens will deal with social opposition and antimilitarist sentiments no less ruthlessly in Germany than the government in Madrid is dealing with the Catalan separatists.

The leading figures in the Greens are determined to take this course. Now, they must, as *Die Zeit* smugly put it, "convince their left-wing base that in spite of all concessions, it is worth forming a coalition with the former archenemies." They are attempting to do this with all their might.

Federal Affairs leader Michael Keller praised the talks with the CDU/CSU, saying that they were "constructive and thus far overlapping factions." And Cem Özdemir, who is striving to secure the post of foreign minister in the Jamaica coalition, told the *Passauer Neue Presse*, "All parties should abandon the high ground so we can negotiate reasonably eye-to-eye."

With an FDP finance minister, a Jamaica coalition would intensify austerity policies across Europe. And with a Green foreign minister, it would press ahead with the militarisation of the European Union. On domestic and refugee policy, all parties are effectively adopting the AfD's programme. For their part, the SPD and Left Party are preparing to maintain control of and suppress any unrest from the left while in opposition.

Nonetheless, it remains unclear whether a Jamaica coalition will be established. The main obstacle is not the Greens, who are prepared to make any concession, but rather the conflicts within the CDU and CSU. Party leaders Angela Merkel and Horst Seehofer are coming under increasing pressure. Following the electoral success of the CDU/CSU's Austrian sister party, the ÖVP, on an anti-immigrant program, the number of politicians calling for opening up to cooperation with the AfD is growing.



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